

Reply to decision letter Round 1 : RR #559 - Stage 2

Dear Recommender,

We sincerely thank you and the reviewers for taking the time to reassess our manuscript and for providing valuable and constructive feedback.

Below, we have included the reviewer's comments along with detailed explanations of the changes we have made in response. The comments are presented in regular text, while our responses appear below each comment in bold.

We hope that the revised manuscript meets the expectations for a stronger Stage 2 submission. We are ready to answer any other questions or comments if necessary.

All the best,

Yara, Constantina & Béatrice

A track-changes comparison of the previous submission and the revised submission displayed side by side can be found on: <https://draftable.com/compare/sIOJRaQAoKFE>

A track-changes manuscript is provided: <https://osf.io/qzdgu>

Response to Reviewer #1 : Pete Harris

First let me apologise for the long delay in providing this review. An eventful summer meant that I have had no time to work on it before mid-September. I have prioritised it on my return to work, but appreciate that this nevertheless has meant a considerable delay for which I am heartily sorry.

Considering the guidelines for evaluating Stage 2 manuscripts, I did not spot any substantial issues arising under 2A-2C. My comments focus mainly on the exploratory analyses and the Discussion (issues arising under 2D and 2E).

The researchers report an exploratory analysis (pp. 32 – 33) that is prompted by the fact that the mean for affective prejudice is nominally smaller in the threat-related self-affirmation condition than in the other conditions (contrary to hypothesis). Exploratory analysis shows that a contrast that compares this mean with the combined means for the other two conditions is statistically significant. (None of the other contrasts tested are statistically significant.) What this means, however, is hard to establish. It is always hard to know where the line is between being sensitive to a cue in the data about a possible effect that should be brought to the attention of researchers for further investigation and uncovering unstable “effects”. The fact that this effect is in the opposite direction to the one predicted strikes me as both good (it is not fishing to confirm the researchers’ hypotheses) and bad (how do we explain it?). The fact that the effect size is below their pre-specified criterion (p. 34) seems to me to be a factor against making too much of this finding.

Nevertheless, the researchers undertake further work (pp. 34-36) to tie this finding down by undertaking an exploratory content analysis of the affirmation texts. This reveals that participants in the secularism condition tended to explain its importance to them in national terms, whereas participants in the humour and physical endurance condition tended to explain its importance to them in individual terms.

- 1) The authors interpret this as indicating that “participants who self-affirmed on secularism have used this value as a shield to protect their national identity, while this is not the case in the other two conditions” (p. 35). They develop this argument both on p. 36 and in the Discussion (p. 37). While this is a possible interpretation, the problem is that the finding is necessarily derived from different values. The claim would be stronger if it could be shown that the different levels of abstraction do not emerge naturally from the values themselves. That is, it is possible that the values naturally lend themselves to thinking in more national or individual terms. It may be that this has important psychological consequences when it comes to self-affirmation, but this possibility needs to be entertained when evaluating the strong claim that participants “used secularism as a protective shield guaranteeing everything that the French Republic stands for, all of which are values that promote tolerance and living together in harmony” (p. 37). It is a subtle difference and I do not want to overstate the point, but wording such as “used ... as a shield” implies to me some intent, whereas it may be that any benefits that accrue are incidental rather than intentional. It may even be that the difference is merely coincidental and immaterial to the findings. This possibility should at least be addressed in the Discussion, albeit while not over-elaborating a tentative finding that stems from a post-hoc exploratory analysis.

RE/ Thank you for this suggestion.

We modified the following sentence, page 35:

“One possible interpretation is that self-affirmation on secularism may have played a protective role for national identity, whereas this would not be the case in the other two conditions.”

We included this paragraph in the Results section, page 36:

“However, this interpretation may imply attributing to the participants an intention to protect their national identity in the self-affirmation on secularism, compared to the two other conditions. An alternative interpretation would be that the values used in the self-affirmation task may inherently encourage thinking in either national or individual terms, secularism being a collective value while humor and physical endurance are more personal ones. We develop this aspect in the discussion section.”

We included this paragraph in the Discussion section, page 38:

“This primarily leads us to think that self-affirmation on secularism may have played a protective role for national identity, which may have led to decreased prejudice in this experimental condition. However, we should be cautious regarding this interpretation, as the individual vs. collective aspects evoked here can be inherent to the values themselves. ”

In order to minimize the interpretation of this effect, we deleted this paragraph from the Discussion :

“Different interpretations can be argued to explain how this led to lower prejudice against religious groups. First, it is possible that asserting French values diminished the perceived threat to national identity and thus reduced defensive prejudice expression. Second, simply reminding participants of other more tolerant French values may have led them to act accordingly, and to display more tolerant attitudes. A third explanation could be that by being reminded of these tolerant values, participants were indirectly compelled to protect and defend secularism as a French concept from being associated with prejudice, thus showing less prejudice here would in itself be a defensive reaction aimed at protecting secularism and the national image and integrity.”

2) I also noted the following while reading the Discussion:

p. 36 :The claim that “the results provide supporting evidence that the malleability of the

understanding of secularism as an ideology influences attitudes” is potentially misleading. These data are correlational and cannot provide evidence of causality. I appreciate that much can be read into the phrase “provide supporting evidence”, but my advice would be to avoid potential misunderstanding by using wording that avoided any implication of causality.

RE/ We have rephrased this sentence to avoid implications of causality page 36 :

“First, the results provide some evidence that the malleability of the understanding of secularism as an ideology is associated with attitudes towards religious groups in France, particularly attitudes towards Muslims. “

- 3) More generally, as someone who is not an expert on prejudice, I would like to have seen the authors spell out clearly what has been added by the principal findings concerning secularism and prejudice and discrimination. These comprise the positive findings from the study, given the lack of support for the hypothesised self-affirmation effects. Do they add to what we know and if so in what way? One reading of the section on pp 36-37 is that they duplicate previous work. I am not suggesting this is a bad thing – just I would like to know for sure whether they duplicate or add and, if the latter, in what way. I think it is there in the Discussion on p.36 and on pp. 38-39, but it could be spelled out for the reader so that they are clear about this contribution.

RE/ We tried to present the contribution of the study more clearly in the current manuscript, page 36 :

“These results are consistent with previous work that show similar relationships between adherence to “new” secularism norms and prejudice and discrimination against immigrants (Anier et al., 2019; Nugier et al., 2016; Roebroek & Guimond, 2016). However, previous research assessed participants' adherence to the principle of new secularism without considering the historical representation of secularism and examined how this adherence was associated with prejudice against North African immigrants, without specifying their religious affiliation. To our knowledge, this study is the first to clearly distinguish between participants with new and historical personal representations of secularism, and to demonstrate how these contrasting representations are related to prejudice against different religious groups.”

Page 37: “This study was a first attempt to test the interaction between secularism representations and self-affirmation interventions on prejudice.”

- 4) p. 39: It depends what you mean by “classical” self-affirmation, but in many self-affirmation studies participants are not asked to rank values and reflect on the highest ranked, but to rate them and reflect on the highest rated. Ranking is a much more onerous procedure. (See also p. 21 in the Method section.)

RE/ We now use “many” instead of “classical” on pages 13, 21 and 39, and give examples of studies that use this procedure (e.g., Badea et al., 2021; Cascio et al., 2016).

- 5) Although the value importance check did find humour to be more important than physical endurance, that isn't really the issue being addressed here. In determining why the self-affirmation manipulation did not affect the outcomes the question is whether humour is sufficiently important to offset the threat to self-integrity. The risk of imposing a value is that it is not.

RE/We added this clarification page 39:

“Although, our value importance check showed that humor received the highest rating of importance to the self, and that physical endurance received the lowest, as intended, our manipulation does not guarantee that humor is sufficiently important to participants to offset the threat to self-integrity.”

We also added this sentence, page 38:

“In addition, the failure of self-affirmation on humor in reducing prejudice could be attributed to participants placing insufficient importance on humor as a value, thus it being incapable of protecting self-integrity from perceived threats coming from religious groups.”

- 6) There are probably other limitations that could potentially have undermined the effectiveness of the self-affirmation manipulation. For instance, in reviewing the stage 1 submission in December 2023 I noted that the distributive matrices could be a problem: “I have some concerns about the extent to which the behaviour matrices will be sensitive to the self-affirmation manipulation. These matrices seem potentially quite complex and involved cognitively and I am not sure the manipulation, which is relatively subtle and potentially time limited, will be sufficiently robust to have an impact on the individual’s responses to it. I am not suggesting the researchers change this element of the design but they should bear this issue in mind when interpreting any null findings.” It seems to me at least worth considering this possibility.

RE/ We added this limitation, page 39 :

“A second limitation pertains to the behavioral prejudice measure and its sensitivity to the self-affirmation manipulation. Distributive matrices, being cognitively complex and demanding, may not be sufficiently sensitive to the subtle and brief self-affirmation activities. This may explain why some effects were not replicated on both affective and behavioral prejudice measures. Future research may benefit from using more sensitive measures of behavioral prejudice.”

- 7) Other issues

Abstract – the current draft has no conclusions.

RE/ We added the following conclusion to the abstract :

“We discuss this result based on an exploratory content analysis of participants’ writings in the self-affirmation task.

This study adds to the literature by clearly demonstrating that new vs. historical representations of secularism are associated with different levels of prejudice against religious groups, particularly Muslims. Future research should develop better interventions based on self-affirmation theory. ”

- 8) Some suggested rewording:

Abstract

“for both affective ($\eta^2 = .004$) and behavioral ($\eta^2 = .005$) dimensions” > “for either affective ... or behavioral ...”

p. 14 The Present Research – should this now be in the past rather than the present tense?

RE/ Thank you for these suggestions, changes have been made accordingly.

Overall, the researchers seem to me to have done a good job of remaining faithful to the pre-registration in this draft and I commend them for the thoroughness their work and the clarity of their write-up.